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Diane Cooper

Annotated Bibliography
Chinese Contract System
and the
Pacific Salmon Industry

Manuscripts and Archives

Alaska Packers Association Records. Administrative Records, 1891-1914, microfilm 1, and 1915-1936, microfilm 2, J. Porter Shaw Library.

These microfilms, located in the J. Porter Shaw Library at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, are copies of the original Alaska Packers Association records in the Alaska State Library archives. They contain the APA Administrative Records which include information on its history, incorporation, fleet, insurance, provisioning, Chinese contracts, cannery statistics, presidents reports, etc. by year.

Alaska Packers Association Records, HDC115, Archives Collection at J. Porter Shaw Library.

The majority of the original Alaska Packers Association records in the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park's J. Porter Shaw Archives are log books of various ships, years, and types as well as some correspondence and administrative papers. The log books contain a variety of information on a number of voyages between San Francisco and the APA's Alaska canneries. Information must be dug out page by page, log by log, box by box.

Lee, Andrew B. "The Chinese Cannery Employees in Alaska, 1880-1900." ms. July, 1963. J. Porter Shaw Library.

This paper fulfilled a requirement in the History of Western Movement seminar course at San Jose State College. It presents an overview of the Chinese work force and the trials they faced as salmon cannery worker prior to the twentieth century. The text, unfortunately, is poorly written and, therefore, much of the information and its value suffer at the author's hands. The true value of this work is found in the bibliography and the appendices. One of the appendices, however, is a bit "odd" since it claims to be "an abridged text of a . . . personal interview with Axel Widerstrom" but seems to follow, nearly word for word the transcripts of oral interviews with Mr. Widerstrom conducted in the 1970s and in the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park's J. Porter Shaw's Oral History Collection.

Loring, Charles M. "Data and Notes on the Sailing Vessel Fleet of the Alaska Packers Association , San Francisco, California." ms. August, 1947. J. Porter Shaw Library.

The vessel information in this manuscript is complete and appears to be quite accurate.

Widerstrom, Axel. Oral History Transcript, September 13, 1974. J. Porter Shaw Library Oral History Collection.

Although Mr. Widerstrom's recollections of his time on board Alaska Packers Association vessels took place approximately 50 years after the event, his attention to detail and ability to present a clear and compelling description of the times, the people, the locations, and the events offers the researcher a rich and highly profitable gold mine of historical data and first hand accounts. Thus far his information has proven verifiable and extremely accurate.

Government Documents

Bower, Ward T. and Henry D. Aller. Alaska Fisheries and Fur Industries In 1916, report prepared for the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries. Appendix II to the Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Fisheries for 1916, Document No. 838. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917.

Includes a list of the number of canneries operated by each packing firm in Alaska by geographic location. There is also a chart which shows the capital invested in the salmon canning industry during 1916 and one which breaks down the number of workers engaged in that business by ethnicity.

Cobb, John N. Pacific Salmon Fisheries. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, Document No. 902. Appendix I to the Report of the Commissioner of the Fisheries for 1921. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921.

This annual report serves as the most complete and in-depth treatment of the Pacific salmon industry up to 1921. The report covers everything from salmon biological to fishing gear, and from how to can to the ethnicity of the cannery workers. Every aspect of the this industry was included in this report as well as government recommendations, legislation, etc. which took place during the report year.

Pacific Salmon Fisheries. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, Document No. 1092. Appendix XIII to the Report of the Commissioner of the Fisheries for 1930. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1930.

This annual report serves as the most complete and in-depth treatment of the Pacific salmon industry up to 1930. The report covers everything from salmon biological to fishing gear, and from how to can to the ethnicity of the cannery workers. Every aspect of the this industry was included in this report as well as government recommendations, legislation, etc. which took place during the report year. Updates in this edition included an examination of the recruitment tactics of sub-contractors like and including Young and Mayer.

Report on Population and Resources of Alaska at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Department of the Interior, Census Office. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893.

Information gathered through the census and set forth in this volume traces the history of the salmon industry in Alaska, charts the 1890 shipments of canned and salted salmon, shows the increase in shipments between 1878 and 1890, discusses the financial plight of the Chinese cannery workers and the exorbitant prices they paid for goods purchased in Alaska, and charts the languages of Alaska by region. Though written in a concise manner, the information is valuable.

California Bureau of Labor. Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1911-1912. John P. McLaughlin, commissioner.

Sacramento: California State Printing Office; 1912.

This annual report contains some repetitive information from year to year on the basic salmon industry. In 1912, however, the report included transcripts from testimony given by five cannery workers during a labor investigation into the Chinese contract system and its alleged abuses.

California Bureau of Labor. Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1917-1918. John P. McLaughlin, commissioner.

Sacramento: California State Printing Office; 1918.

This annual report contains some repetitive information from year to year on the basic salmon industry. In the 1918 edition a copy of an Oriental Pay Roll for the cannery crew assigned to the vessel *Star of Chile* and hired by Chinese contractor Quong Ham Wah. In addition, a list of disputed pay claims set forth by cannery workers assigned to the Alaska Packers Association fleet during the 1918 season is also included.

California Bureau of Labor. Twentieth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1921-1922. John P. McLaughlin, commissioner. Sacramento: California State Printing Office; 1922.

This annual report contains some repetitive information from year to year on the basic salmon industry. This year's report includes a number of charts examining the average net earnings of Alaska cannery workers from 1913 to 1921, inclusive.

California Bureau of Labor. Twenty-First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1923-1924. John P. McLaughlin, commissioner. Sacramento: California State Printing Office; 1925.

This annual report contains some repetitive information from year to year on the basic salmon industry. Includes a further study of the average wages paid, the average deductions against said wages, and the average net pay received by cannery workers.

California Bureau of Labor. Twenty-Third Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1927-1928. John P. McLaughlin, commissioner. Sacramento: California State Printing Office; 1929.

This annual report contains some repetitive information from year to year on the basic salmon industry. Tracks the distribution and deductions made from cannery wages during the 1927 and 1928 seasons.

Washington Bureau of Labor. Special Report on the Salmon Cannery Industry in the State of Washington and the Employment of Oriental Labor. Olympia: State Bureau of Labor, 1915.

Newspapers

Alaska Daily Empire. September 8, 1914.

Alaskan. August 17, 1889.

Alaska Labor News. April 28, 1917.

Ketchikan Alaska Chronicle. November 24, 1925.

Oakland Tribune. Tuesday, September 12, 1933.

New Times. November 24, 1900.

Petersburg Press.

June 5, 1931, August 17, 1934.
Chinese cannery strikes.

San Francisco Chronicle.

April 13, 1920

Article on Quong Ham Wah.

September, 1933.

Articles on the Young and Mayer trial.

San Francisco Examiner.

February 19, 1919

May 30, 1925

Drug usage in the canneries.

September, 1933.

Articles on the Young and Mayer trial.

Seattle Star. April 25, 1924.

Drug usage in the canneries.

Directories

San Francisco City Directory, 1910-1936.

Traced Sam Young and Emile P. Mayer during these years. Determined their various home and business addresses, occupations, and the names of their wives. Also traced the listings for the S. Young Tailoring Co., Inc.

Books

Chinn, Thomas W., (editor). A History of the Chinese in California A Syllabus. San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969.
Offers a good overview with an excellent bibliography at the end of each topic.

Dodd, Gordon B. The Salmon King. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959.

Good biographical treatment of Robert D. Hume and the salmon empire he built in Oregon.

Grinnell, George Bird. Alaska 1899 Essays from the Harriman Expedition. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.

Essay on the Salmon industry described the canneries and the work as he saw it in 1899.

Mears, Eliot Grinnell. Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928.

Good section on the salmon industry and the Chinese contract system. Since it was researched and written during the height of this system's downfall, it focuses on many of the abuses and individuals involved.

Townsend, L. T. The Chinese Problem. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1876.

While the title suggests this volume promoted anti-Chinese sentiments the reverse is actually true. The author found the Chinese workers throughout the Pacific coast to be industrious, long-suffering, patient, and hard-working individuals who, in his opinion, actually enhanced the United States economic welfare. Only a small section concentrates on the salmon industry along the Columbia River, but the observations on Chinese character are quite insightful.

Articles

Guillary, Donald and Jack Masson. "The Exploitation of Chinese Labor in the Alaska Salmon Industry," Chinese America: History and Perspectives 1990. San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1990.

Hilton, Mike. "The Split Labor Market and Chinese Immigration, 1848-1882." The Journal of Ethnic Studies, vol. 6 no. 4 (Winter, 1979): 99-108.

After reviewing the split labor market theory, Hilton expands it and explores the concept of an ethnic bourgeoisie and its impact, both oppressive and benevolent, upon the Chinese workers. The Chinese contract system and cannery workers plight fit his model quite well.

Kirk, William. "Labor Forces of the Alaska Coast." The Survey, vol. 35 (July 1, 1916): 354.

Liljeblad, Sue Ellen. "Ethnic Evolution of the 'China Crew,'" The Sea in Alaska's Past Conference Proceedings. History and Archaeology Publication Series No. 25. Alaska Division of Parks, November, 1979; pp, 389-410.

Presents an overview of the salmon cannery work and workers. Discusses the Chinese contract system and its abuses. Traces the changing face and ethnic make-up of the cannery crew.

Theses and Dissertations

Casaday, Lauren Wilde. "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1938. In many ways this stands as the definitive work on the Pacific salmon industry and its labor problems up to 1938. The fact that the author lived in the Bay Area during the Young and Mayer trial, visited their clothiers, photographed workers waiting to sign on for the canning season, and followed the case as it unfolded, increase the value of this work. This closeness to the subject also serves as a warning to the researcher to beware of bias. The entire Part II of this dissertation concentrates on the cannery workers and the Chinese contract system. A number of appendices also concentrate on these topics and include official transcripts from Emile P. Mayer's trial and copies of the contracts signed by the cannery workers and the S. Young Tailoring Co., Inc. These documents are very valuable.

Orosa, Jose Regalino. "An Investigation of the Non-Resident Personnel Management Problems and Practices in the Alaska Canned Salmon Industry." Masters Thesis, University of Washington, 1948.

Diane Cooper

National Maritime Library Associates
J.Porter Shaw Library
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
Building E, Fort Mason
San Francisco, CA 94123

Dear Karl Kortum Endowment Committee;

Enclosed you will find an abstract for a paper and an annotated bibliography on the topic of the Chinese contract system of labor recruitment for the Pacific coast salmon canneries, with particular emphasis on the Alaska Packers Association canneries, prior to 1935. Between 1871 and 1935 this oppressive system of labor management held a virtual monopoly over the seasonal employment of workers assigned to the Alaska salmon canneries. Ninety different San Francisco based Chinese contractors, individuals and companies, supplied labor for the Alaska Packers Association between 1892, the year of the APA's organization, and 1935 when the workers unionized.

Originally these crews consisted exclusively of Chinese immigrants hired by the local Chinese contractors. These early crews worked without complaint, at least to the white authorities, and in return the Chinese contractor also assisted the crew members adapt to life in America. Following the Exclusion Act of 1882, the number of available Chinese laborers decreased and they were replaced by Japanese, Filipino, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Black laborers. These crews, feel no loyalty or obligation to the Chinese contract system, filed numerous complaints against the Chinese contractors, their subcontractors, and the canneries. These complaints eventually lead to the dismantling of this system and the establishment of the cannery workers unions. In 1936 the newly formed Alaska Cannery Workers Union signed its first contract with the Alaska Packers Association.

Axel Widerstrom, the son of an APA ship captain, recalled the arrival of the China gang in 1919 to the *Star of France* for transportation to the canneries in Alaska in the following excerpt from his oral history recorded on September 13, 1974.

... we were tied up at Pier 38 here in San Francisco. . . . In 1919 there was a firm on Grant Avenue called Mayer and Young[,] . . . more or less of a clothing outfitter[,] And . . . the China contractor, evidently paid. . . so much per head for every man they could get to go to Alaska. . . . So, in this particular instance Mayer and Young, they couldn't get

any men here in San Francisco. So what do they do? They go down to Los Angeles. And evidently they recruited men there and they told them they would bring them to San Francisco and they were going to put them in a hotel, and show them the town and what they weren't going to do. They were going to do all kinds of things. So, however, this particular night the *Yale* came in and one of Crowley's launches was out there and before the *Yale* tied up at the dock they were alongside and taking these men off. They got them off in the launch and then they came to Pier 38. And they started to unload them and the *Star of France* was laying right alongside the dock there. And they told them, 'Well, you're going up to the hotel,' . . .

[T]hey got 'em on the dock and right by the gangway there were a bunch of, ah, men standing there. And pretty soon they pulled out a bunch of clubs. 'Get on board there you son-of-a-bitch. Get on board there.' And 'Weren't we going to a hotel?' And they just shoved them on board there without anything. But one of them happened to get away and of course he went up to the police station and complained. . .

[M]y father was there and saw the whole thing. And this Mayer wanted to come on board and my father says, 'You son-of-a-bitch.' He says, 'You keep off of here. I don't want any of you people on board here. I seen what was going on.'

[And Mayer says,] 'I'm one of Mr. Tischner's jewels.' [Tischner was one of the Alaska Packers officials.]

My father told him he didn't give a damn what he was, he was not coming on board. Well, pretty soon here comes the policeman down there. And my father stood on the gangway and he says, 'You have no jurisdiction over this here matter at all.' He says, 'I'm the lord and master here. You can not come on board.'

And they says, 'Well, there is something that's been going on here.' He says, 'Well, you cannot come on board.' So they turned around and left. And that was one of the ways they used to recruit the men, which I thought was very cruel.

Mr. Widerstrom continued describing in-depth the shipboard conditions endured by the members of the China gang and the treatment they received.

Prior to reading this transcript, my knowledge and interest in the China gang stemmed from overseeing an Eagle Scout project that restored the only remaining vestiges of the *Balclutha*'s Chinatown, the shipboard quarters of the China gang. Mr. Widerstrom's descriptions, empathy, and mention of the sub-contractors Mayer and Young and their

subsequent arrest and trial piqued my interest and suggested to me a need to pursue this topic.

The bibliography has been amassed during my subsequent research. Items I have not yet been able to secure copies of do not have any annotation. The bulk of entries, however, are annotated and have already proven quite helpful in my research. This bibliography is also accompanied by a proposal for a paper which I am in the process of writing and hoping to deliver at an upcoming conference of the North American Society for Oceanic History. As I proceed with this research I realize the amount of information I am uncovering will easily produce more than just this one paper. For me, Mr. Widerstrom's memories have opened a whole new area of maritime history and research.

Sincerely,



Diane Cooper

J. Porter Shaw Library
S.F. Maritime NHP

Abstract

Young and Mayer, a Case Study of the Alaska Packers and Its Use of the Chinese Contract System

The history of the Pacific coast salmon industry reflects the social, economic, and political practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Exploitation, ruthless business practices, harsh work conditions, poor wages, and discrimination prevailed throughout the industry from its earliest days and evolved into an intricate system of labor abuse which finally culminated in the formation of the Alaska Cannery Workers Union and its first contract between the cannery workers and the Alaska Packers canneries signed on April 4, 1936. Prior to that year cannery labor for the Alaska Packers Association was procured through the Chinese contract system, a system riddled with graft and corruption which perpetuated the abuse and exploitation of the seasonal cannery laborers.

First employed in the 1870s, the members of the Chinese cannery crew helped to make the industry into the most profitable one in Alaska and yet they received poor wages, lived and worked in abusive conditions, and were exploited by both the white business owners and the Chinese businessmen who recruited them. Although government investigations and reports devoted pages to this labor recruitment system and its abuses, little has been written about it since its official dismantling. The celebrated court case against Sam Young and Emile P. Mayer, San Francisco labor sub-contractors working with the Chinese contractor Quong Ham Wah, filled the local newspapers in the early 1930s. These two white businessmen were tried and convicted on charges of peonage while Quong Ham Wah escaped prosecution.

This paper will trace the rise and fall of the Chinese cannery system, examine the conditions the workers were subjected to, look at the practice of debt bondage which decimated the seasonal earnings of the workers, and delve into the court case against Mayer and Young in 1934. While this system existed throughout the salmon industry, the focus of this paper will be the San Francisco Chinese contractors employed by the Alaska Packers Association between 1892 and 1935.